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CHANGE IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

By Alexander Boeker

The Republic of Czechoslovakia used to be called the "godchild of the United States". Woodrow Wilson's doctrine of self-determination enabled the new State to rise from the wreckage of the Austro-Hungarian Empire after the First World War. A deep spiritual bond united the great American President and the father of the Czechoslovak State, Thomas Garrigue Masaryk. The Constitution of the new State was actually written and promulgated in an American city -- Pittsburgh.

Between the two great wars Czechoslovakia was rightly counted among the most democratic and progressive States in Europe. Though Americans, in fondness for their godchild, tended to overlook some defects, it is incontestable that the First Czechoslovak Republic showed high respect for civil liberties and democratic procedures. Liberal institutions were upheld in Czechoslovakia as one after another of its neighbors succumbed to dictatorship.

On May 26, however, the people of Czechoslovakia went to the polls and rolled up the strongest Communist vote yet registered in any country not directly under the Russian heel. The ballots cast for this party were twice as numerous as those polled by any of its rivals.

In the Czech provinces of Bohemia and Moravia, 40.3 per cent of the voters gave their ballots to the Communists; in Slovakia, 30.7 per cent. Together with the Socialists, whose dominant Left Wing under Prime Minister Zdenek Fierlinger is strongly pro-Communist, the totalitarian Left commands 152 seats in the National Assembly, which will draft a new Constitution. The Center and Right together will have only 148 seats. The Communists obtained absolute majorities in Prague and most large towns of Bohemia and Moravia.

II

This outcome should not have aroused the surprise which it has occasioned in the United States. Ever since Czechoslovakia's "liberation" by the Red Army, and the replacement of the old local government system by Soviet-type "National Councils", Communists have been

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entrenched in key positions throughout the country.

President Benes and his Government did not return from their London exile as free age Significantly, the presidential party traveled by way of Moscow, where Mr. Benes discussed the formation of his first post-war Government with Communist Czech exiles and with Soviet officials. The program of the new Government, proclaimed at Kosice (Kaschau), on April 1(1945, contained, among others, the following significant sentence:

> "Expressing the deep gratitude of the Czechoslovakian nation to the USSR, the Government will unwaveringly maintain, as the leading line of Czechoslovakian foreign policy, the closest alliance with the victorious great Slav power in the East."

Although, officially, the old Constitution of Thomas Masaryk is still in force, neith its spirit nor its letter is any longer inviolate. Under the blanket charge of "collabora tion", tens of thousands of Czechs and Slovaks have been thrown into jail. People's Court on the Nazi and Soviet model, have been set up to try political offenses.

In the First Czechoslovak Republic there were more than 20 parties. Now there are onl four, because no party can be formed without a license from the Ministry of the Interior, whose head is a Communist, Vacslav Nosek. The Agrarian Party and the Slovak People's Part once the largest parties in the Czech and Slovak provinces respectively, are banned.

Newspapers enjoy no more freedom than political parties. They must obtain a license from the Ministry of Information, headed by the Communist Kopecky, who spent the war years in Moscow. When President Benes' own party, the National Socialists, attempted to publish an independent paper, the following warning was, on May 13, broadcast by Radio Prague:

> "The publication of journals for which no publishing permit has been issued . . . cannot and will not be permitted. . . . The Press Department will take action against any printing press which might publish such illegal newspapers."

The acid test of a democratic state is whether all citizens feel safe within its juri diction. There are now thousands of Czechoslovak refugees, mostly Slovaks, in the American Zone of Austria, trembling at the thought of repatriation. Many others, Czechs and Slovak alike, have never dared return from their Nazi-imposed exile in London or the United State In short, Czechoslovakia is no longer a model democracy in the heart of Europe.

III

Control of the machinery of government, however, is insufficient explanation of the

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large Communist vote at the recent elections. All observers are agreed that open terrorization was little in evidence. Gratitude to Russia for deliverance from Nazi rule was undoubtedly a factor in the great change that has taken place. More important, it seems, was the fact that the Czechs, the westernmost of the Slav peoples and hence the most ardent Pan-Slavists, are beginning to identify Slavism and Communism.

The new Pan-Slavist nationalism of the Czechs has found its most blatant expression in their policy toward national minorities, especially the Germans and Hungarians who for at least 700 years have lived in Bohemia, Moravia and Slovakia. Once known for its relatively high respect for minority rights, Czechoslovakia has now adopted a policy of ruthless expropriation and expulsion of all its citizens who speak a foreign tongue. This policy, for which ultra-Nationalist Czechs and not the Communists are responsible, affects three and one-half million Sudeten-Germans and some three-quarters of a million Hungarians. These elements were deprived by Presidential Decree of their citizenship and property.

The nightmare conditions under which these expulsions take place have been repeatedly denied by the Prague Government, but are attested by eyewitness accounts. Often no more than ten minutes notice is given to evacuees. No provision is made for new homes in other countries. Many of the victims spend months in internment camps which almost rival Belsen and Buchenwald. Men and even children are often temporarily retained as slave labor. Officially, active anti-Nazis have been excepted from this brutal policy, but in practice they are treated like the rest. Even German-speaking Jews, who felt the brunt of Nazi persecution, have suffered. The expatriation law, in fact, was so phrased as to include them in its provisions.

These events have a somber significance for the future. A State which treats its national minorities in this manner will not shrink from treating political minorities similarly.

IV

The future of Czechoslovakia cannot be a matter of indifference to Europe or to America. Bismarck said that the master of Bohemia is the master of Europe. This was widely quoted when Hitler marched into Prague. It is now time to remember it again. From an eastern outpost of democracy and tolerance, Czechoslovakia has become a western outpost of Communist

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totalitarianism and racial intolerance.

Already Czechoslovakia has gone further than any other European country in imitating the Soviet economic system. Latest reports indicate that some 70 per cent of the country's industries have been nationalized. The collapse of Czechoslovakia's export industries, through the expulsion of the skilled German workers and managers on whom they had depended for centuries, will drive the country deeper into the economic orbit of Soviet Russia.

In military matters, the Second Czechoslovak Republic is even more closely lined up with Russia, and the efficient Czech Army is now ardently pro-Soviet. A system similar to that of the political commissars in the Red Army was introduced, and on May 1 Radio Prague quoted a Colonel Prochazka as saying:

> "The foundations have been laid for a new, democratic people's army. We have done away with the so-called non-political character of our forces."

General Bocek-Chodsky, in announcing the Czech rearmament program, immediately after the German collapse, said:

> "The organization, armament and training of the Czechoslovak Army will be identical with those of the Red Army. Chosen Czechoslovak officers will be sent to Soviet Russian military schools and Russian training officers will visit Czechoslovakia."

The full meaning of the Soviet-Czech alliance was clearly revealed by Premier Fierlinger who said on May 23, 1946, just before the recent election:

> "It is our duty as Allies to agree to every request of the Soviet General Staff to permit the Red Army units to cross our territory."

In Europe this point has been well understood. The Swiss radio at Berne, on May 27, broadcast the following commentary on the Czech elections:

> "Yesterday's ballot shows the free will of the Czechoslovakians. By admitting the result of the municipal elections in Germany [American Zone] as corresponding to the free will of the voters, one might clearly discern the mark between the countries partial to Western democracy and the nations known for their Eastern variety. It is to be hoped that this line of division will not develop into a barrier."

One must hope, further, that the Czech people will hesitate before the abyss of totalitarian rule and show that now, as in 1919, they are willing to join in the building of a united and truly democratic Europe, to which ideal they have contributed so much.

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Not Merely Gossip *A Supplement to* Human Events Vol. III - No. 23

By Frank C. Hanighen June 5, 1946

Mr. Truman's political horoscope has been the subject of intensive exploration during the past week. No Democrat can altogether deny that his Party and President face dark possibilities. Impartial political observers believe that a centrifugal movement has started among the varied forces which gave the Party its victories in the past decade. But caution is urged before one assumes that the Party is going to break up. Truman may have another opportunity. There could arise another crisis (it may be the threatened maritime strike, or quite a different issue) in which the President might repair the political damage. This possibility should not be overlooked.

The maritime strike, scheduled for June 15, presents Truman with a less difficult situation than the rail and coal strikes. The maritime union front is in a much weaker position than the mine workers and railway unions, for various reasons. (1) It is badly split. Roughly speaking, it has the seamen but not the longshoremen on the East Coast; on the West Coast, the longshoremen but not the seamen. The East Coast A. F. of L. longshoremen, under Joe Ryan, oppose the strike; as do the West Coast seamen, the A. F. of L. Seafarers Union. (2) Seamen have received very substantial basic pay increases since the end of the war; and pressure from the rank and file is therefore not irresistable. (3) Since most ships are still under the War Shipping Administration, the men would be striking against the Government. (4) The fact that this strike, even if fairly successful, would have much fewer repercussions on the economy of the country is another factor of weakness. (5) There is strife within the National Maritime Union between Communists and anti-Communist factions. (6) Bayonets won't mine coal, but the Navy can certainly run ships. Before the men walk out, there may be some soul-searching among their leaders.

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"Vote Communist and preserve your right to property" was a Communist slogan in the recent French election campaign which reduced to absurdity the Machiavellian tactics of the Communist Party and must have contributed to its lack of success. For a definite check was administered to Communism by the striking victory of the MRP. The success of this Christian Social party, in contrast to the comparatively mediocre showing of the conservative PRL and the Radicals, suggests that many voters in their desire to stop the Communist tide preferred to cast their ballots for the farthest Left of the anti-Marxist parties. The MRP laurels are not those of social reaction.

An imponderable factor, but one to inspire considerable reflection, was the influence of the Catholic Church. On the surface, the Church did not take a partisan stand. But reliable observers in France believe that it greatly affected the result. There may well be a connection between the MRP victory and the marked strength of the Christian Social parties in Belgium, Holland, Germany and Italy (in this week's election). It is noteworthy that the French and Italian elections followed an appeal from the Pope, who in effect urged voters to maintain "western civilization". One can discount a Papal appeal in France. But it may nevertheless have been something like this idea of defending western civilization which prompted so many French voters to "hold the line" against encroaching totalitarianism. The contrast with Czechoslovakia, examined in our Analysis this week, is pronounced.

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Behind l'Affaire von der Becke (the former Argentine Chief of Staff now on a mysterious visit to Washington) lies a hitherto undisclosed story of the long and tenacious arm of President Perón. General von der Becke has really come here to give authority to the interesting proposals of the Argentine military mission on the subject of hemisphere defense. Members of that mission have already indicated their endorsement, in principle, of an inter-American defense pact. But they have also -- with perfectly straight faces --

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made what they claim is a constructive suggestion. One integral defense pact, they intimate, might prove cumbersome. Why not, then, break it up into three subsidiary arrangements? The United States would be responsible for security in the Carribean area. Brazil would protect the "bulge". It would be reserved for Argentina to "protect" the southern states of South America -- Chile, Bolivia, Paraguay and Uruguay. In short, the wily Argentines are simply asking for United States recognition of the Argentine bloc, the sphere which Perón has been busily trying to construct for the past two years. Now the United States Army and Navy, which want the inter-American defense pact, inclusive of Argentina, no matter how red the face of the State Department, think the gentlemen from Buenos Aires are going a bit far. That's why Eisenhower is having von der Becke to lunch.

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Over three months ago, and again last week, this column noted a trend in British thinking about foreign policy. We quoted British publicists of the Left as advocating a British "neutral" or "isolationist" line as between Russia and the United States. In the past week, Marshal Smuts, a Conservative, has reinforced this plea in two speeches, in which he urged that the British Empire take its place as a buffer, "in the middle", between Russia and the United States. However, Foreign Secretary Bevin's address of June 3 did not reflect these sentiments. It would appear that some furious thinking is going on among those who formulate British policy and opinion; and that the issue has not been finally resolved.

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The political tribulations of Truman may be best understood by recalling a parallel in the Presidential career of William Howard Taft. President Theodore Roosevelt in 1908 chose Taft as his successor because he was acceptable to both progressive and conservative wings of the Republican Party. Taft, after taking office, sought faithfully to follow the progressive policies of T. R. The great schism in the Republican Party, which resulted in Wilson's victory in 1912, was basically one of personalities rather than policies. Taft did not break with T. R.'s policies, but with T. R.'s friends, although he did not really intend to break with the latter. He simply preferred his own friends, his own "kitchen cabinet". Hence, T. R.'s friends, notably Gifford Pinchot, poisoned the former President's mind about his successor, and precipitated the historic row. Pinchot eventually left the Taft cabinet, with resounding effects.

A very similar situation exists today. Truman has tried to follow the path of F. D. R. in domestic legislation. Even his anti-strike legislation -- despite contrary propaganda by worshippers of the "Roosevelt myth" -- had the precedent of F. D. R.'s anti-strike proposals of 1943-44. On foreign policy, Truman at first tried to ape his predecessor, then changed. But F. D. R. might well have changed too, if he had lived.

The important fact is that there is a break between Truman and F. D. R.'s satellites -- Ickes, Morgenthau, Biddle, Hillman, etc. Snyder, Allen, Clark have moved into the proverbial kitchen. Wallace alone of the New Dealers stays on in the Cabinet. Will the Iowa mystic prove to be the Gifford Pinchot of the Truman régime? His course may be decisive in determining whether the battle within the Democratic Party on the plane of personalities will be effectively resolved, or will end in another 1912 -- this time to the profit of the Republican Party.

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A hitherto unpublicized asset has contributed to the value, and hence to the bitterness, of the wrangle over Trieste and its surrounding province of Venezia Giulia. All through that province and the Istrian peninsula on which it is located are mammoth limestone caves, some of them running under the present occupation lines. Military experts deem these subterranean formations of no little potential military value. They say that

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possibly five divisions could be concealed in these natural shelters against heavy air bombardment or atomic bomb attacks; and that extensive factories could be housed therein. To the layman, this feature may sound visionary. But, at the Command and Staff School at Leavenworth, new tactical considerations are being thoroughly explored, in the light of the advent of atomic warfare.

Naturally, military considerations are not the only, nor even the most decisive, ones in dealing with the problem of Venezia Giulia. The bulk of the exports which flowed through its wharves in the pre-war years came from Czechoslovakia, Austria and Hungary rather than from Yugoslavia, which now claims the territory. As an outlet, therefore, of the products of the Soviet-dominated Danube basin it assumes great importance which helps to explain the stubborn opposition of Molotov to the Byrnes-Bevin demand that Trieste remain in Italian hands.

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For an example of cool constructive statesmanship by a member of the legislative branch turn to the Congressional Record (May 31, 1946) which contains the well-reasoned arguments of Senator Taft against President Truman's anti-strike bill. In the midst of hysteria on one side and crass party politics on the other, Taft urged the setting aside of the bill because the strike emergency had passed, and because any such legislation should only be reserved for emergencies. Taft freely conceded that some such legislation, with cautionary amendments, would be needed in an emergency. But he carefully defined "emergency" so that no executive could take liberties with the word. Taft proposed that such emergency legislation should be framed now, after calm consideration: "make it as perfect as we can make it, and then put it on the shelf. . . . We should never call it into use unless Congress authorizes its use by a joint resolution to the effect that the country faces an emergency and that it is willing to make of the President a dictator."

As for the uninformed public which unthinkingly railed at Congress for not "acting", Taft also urged unbiased consideration of the labor problem, discounting "unreasonable demands for immediate action from thousands of persons who do not really, fundamentally, understand the facts and difficulties involved in any labor situation". Going on, he put in a nutshell the primary danger of the situation: "We cannot have a free economy if the Government in effect fixes wages and thereby destroys the process of collective bargaining. The Government cannot fix wages unless it also goes further and fixes prices . . . the Government becomes the ultimate arbiter . . . in that event we have, in effect, a totalitarian government."

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Russia has offered to provide Argentina with Russian and German scientists in exchange for food and raw materials, according to a UP dispatch from Buenos Aires (May 29). The Soviet Union is of course legally free to do with its own citizens as it pleases, but under international law it has no right to trade enemy nationals as if they were so many head of cattle. Military Government in Berlin estimated several months ago that the Soviet Union still held close to four million German war prisoners, who were employed as slave labor. In addition there are several million German civilians forcibly removed from Eastern Germany and other parts of Europe. This is impressive evidence of the revival -- ominous to modern civilization -- of the institution of human slavery.

Americans cannot afford to be self-righteous in this matter. The United States is a signatory to the Geneva Convention, whereas Russia is not. Yet we have turned hundreds of thousands of German prisoners of war over to France and Britain for slave labor, despite the provision of the Geneva Convention enjoining return of prisoners to their homeland at the end of hostilities. Prisoners in Britain have been humanely treated, but the same cannot be said of France. While the United States is not accused of brutal treatment of war prisoners still held here, it is charged by neutrals that since V-E day various punitive measures and lowering of the standard of food, recreation and treatment have been introduced, to the detriment of the re-education program.

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Notes and Quotes

That indeed was a dramatic moment, when President Truman interrupted his epochal address to read a note -- handed him by the Secretary of the Senate -- announcing the capitulation of the railway strikers. But wasn't it really just a piece of good "theatre", planned in advance? "The President knew that Whitney and Johnston had surrendered before he commenced his speech", a well-informed Democratic Senator confided to this column. He added that Les Biffle, Senate Secretary, had quite literally played the role of the Shakespearean messenger. Charlie Ross, White House press chief, indignantly denies this story. Whether true or not, the Truman incident is not the only case in recent history of a statesman profiting by a "last-minute" message.

Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain made a gripping speech in the House of Commons on September 28, 1938. The atmosphere was electric: the British Navy had been mobilized; Parliament assembled; a declaration of war widely anticipated. Mr. Chamberlain opened with a description of his stormy conference with Hitler at Godesberg. His portrayal -- particularly of the temperament of the Fuehrer -- was calculated to make his hearers draw one conclusion which they did not desire: war. Suddenly, Sir John Simon passed a note to the Prime Minister, who read it and smiled. A Four Power Conference at Munich, he announced, had been arranged. Again he would travel to accomplish what his listeners really wanted: peace. The audience -- like Congress the other day -- went wild with joy. Chamberlain, somewhat like Truman, became the man of the hour. But, when the smoke cleared over Fleet Street, the knowing ones remarked: "He had already arranged Munich before he started to speak"; and even in Paris one important journalist, Fabre-Luce, said "It was bonne farce".

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Mr. Kingsley Martin, Editor of the London New Statesman and Nation, visiting Berlin and viewing the ruins, found a compelling parallel between the work of our bombers and modernistic art: "For half its [the Tiergarten's] length the trees have been smashed down to jagged stumps, and the area is thickly pock-marked with craters. Amongst the stumps and the craters lie fantastically the remains of the statues, some broken and some still upright, which were once a peculiar object of enjoyment to the Berliner on his Sunday afternoon walk. They lie there in distorted attitudes -- the military heroes of Germany's past, the torsos of Greek gods, and with an astonishingly bizarre effect, strange prehistoric beasts surveying with stony eyes the abomination of desolation around them. The painter of this . . . is obviously Dali. Indeed, he and other surrealists have already painted it. The monster's head with the lily growing from its mouth is here, not in fancy, but in grotesque reality. The surrealists portrayed their evil and prophetic dreams and were accused of being degenerates, gloating over a half-desired destruction. Their dreams have come true. They are now the most photographic of realists."

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The Economist (May 4, 1946) discusses atomic control: "To entrust atomic development to an 'international' body -- say to the Security Council -- is in fact to share it among the nations, to give it, not to any world authority, but to the United States, the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union, France, China, Poland, the Netherlands, Australia, Brazil, Mexico and Egypt. And to do this would surely be far more dangerous than to keep the secrets in the possession of a single country whom nobody can seriously suspect of aggressive intentions. When the Lilienthal Report speaks of an international authority, it does not mean one which, like Uno, is literally 'international', but rather one that is non-national, or supra-national, or extra-national. It is right to hold that the only hope for the world lies in placing atomic energy in the trust of a body impartial between the nations. But the American and British Governments are also following a sound instinct in refusing to hand over their knowledge indiscriminately to other national governments under the banner of 'internationalism'."

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